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### Pontifical Household Preacher on This Sunday's Gospel

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ROME, AUG. 18, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the Pontifical Household, on this Sunday's Gospel reading.

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#### My Blood Is Drink Indeed

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

The Gospel passage continues the reading of chapter 6 of John. The new element is that to the discourse on bread Jesus adds that of wine; to the image of food he adds that of drink, the gift of his flesh and of his blood. Here, Eucharistic symbolism reaches its culmination and totality.

Last week we said that to understand the Eucharist, it is important to begin with the signs chosen by Jesus. Bread is the sign of food, of communion among those who eat it together; through it he comes to the altar and all human work is sanctified. Let us ask the same question for the blood.

What does the word blood mean to us and what does it evoke? In the first place, it evokes all the suffering that exists in the world. If, therefore, in the sign of bread man's work comes to the altar, in the sign of blood all human pain also comes there. It comes to be sanctified and to receive meaning and the hope of rescue thanks to the blood of the immaculate Lamb, to which it is united as drops of water mixed with wine in the chalice.

But, why, precisely, did Jesus choose wine to signify his blood? Just because of the affinity of color? What does wine represent for men? It represents joy, celebration; it does not represent usefulness so much (as bread does) but delight. It is not only made to drink, but also to toast. Jesus multiplied the loaves because of the people's need, but in Cana he multiplied the wine for the delight of the guests. Scripture says that "wine gladdens man's heart and bread strengthens it" (Psalm 104:15).

If Jesus had chosen bread and water for the Eucharist, he would only have indicated the sanctification of suffering ("bread and water" are in fact synonymous with fasting, austerity and penance). By choosing bread and wine he also wished to indicate the sanctification of joy. How wonderful it would be if we also learned to live the joys of life in a Eucharistic manner, that is, in thanksgiving to God. God's presence and look do not cloud our honest joys; on the contrary, they enlarge them.

But, in addition to joy, wine also evokes a grave problem. In the second reading we hear this warning of the Apostle: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." He suggests that inebriation with wine be combated with "the sober inebriation of the Spirit," one inebriation replaced with another.

At present there are many initiatives of recovery among people with problems of alcoholism. They try to use all the means suggested by science and psychology. They cannot but be encouraged and supported. But those who believe should not neglect the spiritual means, which are prayer, the sacraments and the word of God.

In the work, "The Russian Pilgrim," a true story is told. A soldier addicted to alcohol and threatened with being discharged went to a holy monk to ask him what he should do to overcome his vice. The monk ordered him to read a chapter of the Gospel every night before going to bed.

The soldier acquired a Gospel and began to read it diligently. But soon after he returned desolate to the monk to tell him: "Father, I am too ignorant and I don't understand anything of what I read! Give me something else to do."

The monk replied: "Just continue reading. You don't understand, but the devils understand and tremble." The soldier did so and was freed from his vice. Why not give this a try?

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